



drivebyS

Tom Corrado

again, for you . . .

Suppose I were to begin by saying that poetry is
aural sex. That poetry is my erotic other. Suppose I
were to speak this as though it were a confession.
That it began slowly. AS a curiosity. An appreciation.
Then, one day, it became more. A captivation. A
seduction. That I had been seduced by the sound of
words, by the sounds words make when they engage.

~

OK, but what is poetry?

~

Poetry is words.
Every word weighs.

~

Words trigger images.

~

thoughts › ideas › words › images › poems

~

... but it's much more, says Patti Smith.

~

Can anyone die without even a little bit of poetry?,
asks Mark Strand.

~

I do this I do that, quotes Frank O'Hara

~

Say what? ... LANGUAGE ... is a tool, an organic,
untrustworthy, limited system of symbols for
communicating ideas.

~

The question, says looking glass Alice,

is whether you can make words mean so many different things.

~

It is impossible to speak in such a way that you cannot be misunderstood. - Karl Popper

~

It's 1818, a dreary wintry Saturday afternoon. Horace Smith, banker, travels roughly 30 miles from London to Marlow to visit his friend, Percy Shelley, a mere boy with snub nose, spindly six-feet, and wild hair which he dunks in a pail of water from time to time for as he says the freshness of it. His wife, Mary, a wild-eyed young redhead, reads Tacitus for hours. Her novel, Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus, is at the printer's. The three talk pharaohs, and the grandest pharaoh of them all, Ramses II, who had a 57-foot statue of himself erected at Thebes inscribed with his name User-ma-Ra which the Greek historian Herodotus made a hash of, changing it to Ozymandias. The full inscription read King of Kings User-ma-Ra am I. If any want to know how great I am and where I lie, let them outdo my deeds. Smith and Shelley decide to have some fun and write sonnets about the toppled monument which is all that remains of Ramses II's greatness. Smith titles his On a Stupendous Leg of Granite, Discovered Standing by Itself in the Deserts of Egypt, with the inscription inserted below. Shelley calls his

Ozymandias. In 10 minutes flat, or thereabouts, he composed one of the greatest poems of all time.

Ozymandias

I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half-sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things.
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings,
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Here's Rilke, across the ages:
Dear darkening ground,
Just give me a little more time.
I just need a little more time, . . .

I use the metaphor of a hotel to show that the house
of poetry is huge, with rooms for all types of poets
and all flavors of poems.

The poetry hotel was opened in the 1800s
by Walt (Whitman) and Emily (Dickinson).

~

July 4th, 1855. A lonely 36-year-old closeted homosexual from a family of misfits, a printer, an editor, a sometimes teacher who hates teaching, loves opera, oratory, the streets, the rivers, bohemianism, reads widely but indiscriminately, an inveterate scribbler, note-taker, self-promoter, huge ego, reinvents himself in a poem, becomes the poem, concussively confident, gutsy, enthusiastically high on life, a kosmos, embracing everyone and everything, celebrating everyone and everything, inventing a distinctly new art showcasing a presumptive "I" and an assumptive "you," unshackling the line, the rhyme, the rhythm; its utter wildness changing the course of world literature; embodying the ideals, attributes, subjects, and speech of his native land, America; foreshadowing Allen Ginsberg's century-later pronouncement of spontaneous and fearless first thought best thought: his 1855 first edition of *Leaves of Grass* is by far the best of all nine; later versions suffer bloat, hamstrung by self-indulgence and overwork; *Leaves* flips poetry on its head, turns it upside-down, becomes the Holy Grail before which other poets prostrate themselves.

~

Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one
of a crowd. - Walt Whitman, Crossing Brooklyn Ferry

I am haunted by her presence. I am haunted by her
words. Her intensity. Her genius. Who was this
woman? This otherworldly being? This strange, witty,
gifted, little redhead with hazel eyes and a contralto
voice who, almost singlehandedly, revolutionized
poetry and the language of poetry from her white-
curtained, high-ceilinged second-floor bedroom,
writing poems and letters at night at a child's
school desk, sewing the poems into packets, locking
the packets away for discovery after she'd passed,
redefining the landscape of poetry, repopulating it
with her own capitalization, punctuation, and meter;
throwing off the shackles of convention, crafting a
new persona for the first person as a keen, sharp-
sighted, ironic observer who confronted head-on
society's constraints and limitations and replaced
them with imagined and imaginable alternatives;
sharing little, publishing little, retreating into
herself for the sake of her revolutionary art,
leaving a legacy of almost 1,800 idiosyncratic,
enigmatic poems and 10,000 letters that spellbind
us still?

I'm Nobody! Who are you? - Emily Dickinson

April is the cruelest month, insists T. S. Eliot.

~
A repurposed wasteland appears.
The walls whitewashed.
The floors swept.
But the rooms remain empty.
Meanwhile, stories . . .

~
It's 1967. The Summer of Love.
You're living in a VW Bus
trout fishing in America with Richard Brautigan
drifting along like an easy creek
reading poetry to find yourself . . .

~
How should a person be?, asks Sheila Heti.

~
What is it all about?
What are you all about?
You get what you put into trout fishing in America
stepping in the water
feeling the cool drift
taking it with you.
Taking what?
The otherworldly contours of love.
The spellbinding angularities.
The waking-in-the-middle-of-the-night
inconsistencies.
The ups and downs . . . the ins and outs . . .
the wicked game.

She dances to Strauss's Annen Polka,
floating with the wide-eyed innocence
of a nine-year-old who has yet to glimpse
the world of the backstage.
Look at her taut sureness, the steadiness and poise,
the promise of her young movements
as they transcend choreography with a joy that,
you can only hope, will buoy her through a life
filled with huge pockets of uncertainty.

~

... and so the damage
the static of hair between eye sockets
dropping to the floor
arms shaking
making room for 9-1-1's
which hospital?
before hitting the siren
over snow-covered streets
as if we are going
to grandmother's house.

~

You cross over and find yourself in a choral group
performing Arvo Pärt's The Peace.
This is good. This is really good.
The puzzle at the foot of your bed?
You try to recall the connection.
The mystery of happiness without remorse
or something like that. You're not sure.
Here's how it's done, the caped magician told you

after your eighth birthday party.
Misdirection. Misdirection.

~

At 42, she faced her final storm,
and now floats, high above the seas,
guiding fellow sailors,
her last words, Goodbye, my love.
You turn the soil for a vegetable garden:
tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, eggplant.
Rhode Island Reds appear
scratching for worms with gnarled, yellow claws.
Your grandfather, a blacksmith,
is here, too, from the dead,
a stubby Philip Morris dangling from his lower lip.
He speaks to you, in Polish, about happiness.

~

K. H. Brandenburg tweaks an algorithm for
compressing audio files to birth MP3s using Suzanne
Vega's a cappella, Tom's Diner.

~

You return to a post
about a rhino poacher
who was stomped to death by an elephant
then eaten by a pride . . .

~

She checks herself out of detox
chugging rubbing alcohol and hand sanitizer
and into an ICU where a voice says
You're not going anywhere

but to a pSyCh ward
and a 28-day program . . .
and the Monkey laughs
and rides Shotgun
through late-night streets.

~

It's good that grandma's here
on this early July morning
on the beach
in her hOUSeDreSS
with her beach chair
and it's good that she's invited you
to sit on her lap for a while,
watch your cousins in the water
and slowly wade into the day.

~

On reconnaissance in his second tour of Viet Nam,
he takes a Shrapnel
dying 35 years later at 57
without a memory of a parade
because there were none.

~

Looking at the lobsters in their watery cells
awaiting execution by boiling water
reminds you of David Foster Wallace,
clinically depressed for most of his life
who one day stopped taking Nardil
walked out onto his back porch
threw a rope over a beam and hanged himself.

wallace was an abusive assaultive explosive
misogynistic
gifted alcoholic and drug addict.
Looking away from the lobsters
you think of Consider the Lobster
wallace's essay highlighting
the unethical abuse of animals
in which he asks
Is it right to boil alive a sentient creature
for our gustatory pleasure?
Knowing that the so-called scream
of the lobster being boiled alive
is not its voice but air rushing out
of the holes in its shell doesn't help . . .
nor should it.

~
You've stopped by again today
to see how your father's doing.
It's August and he's eighty-six.
He's asked for some blackberries.
So you're out here,
in the blackberry bushes,
in shirt and tie,
picking.

~
You get lost with Chet Baker
replaying the opening bars
to All Blues from The Last Great Concert
recorded two weeks before he fell

out of a window in Amsterdam . . .
because you can't stop
because it's real . . .
one of the realest things you've encountered . . .

~

She breaks into her counselor's office
at the therapeutic community house
drinks a bottle of hand sanitizer
and is taken to the emergency room
where she drinks more hand sanitizer
then sneaks out of the hospital . . . wasted . . .
She's picked up by the police
taken to a homeless shelter
on Christmas Eve
then back to the community house
the day after Christmas
where she apologizes to her counselor
and the other residents
and is put on probation . . .
binging . . . purging . . .
She is given the option of treatment for bulimia . . .
She refuses
and is discharged to a cot
in a warming center
where the lights go out at 9 . . .
Next day . . . She's back on the street . . .

~

Do you believe in magic?
Of course you do.

~
March 28, 1941, a little before noon
Virginia Woolf
with hat walking stick overcoat
and large heavy stone
wades into the River Ouse drowning herself.
She was an escape artist
who mapped the extraordinariness
of our interiors . . .
not unlike Anthony Bourdain
who wanted to be remembered as an enthusiast
introducing us to the wonderful world of food
in all its wonderfulness
before hanging himself
in a hotel room in eastern France . . .

~
Elizabeth Bishop catches a tremendous fish.
~

The neighborhood Carl Jung
at the wheel of a Ferrari
cruises you on your bimonthly talking cure
collecting your unconscious
to pry open the shyness
that smacks you back
to the darkness of OCD . . .
You enjoy these cosplays
with their pretend puddings
and freedom from counting syllables . . .
It's all theater, yes? . . .

~
Latin Class. 1960.

Julius Caesar is dividing Gaul into three parts.
Three rows over, an upperclassman,
in the school uniform
imprisons you in The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari
with her long legs
while Marcus Tullius Cicero addresses the Senate
with his Third Oration:
How long, O Catiline, will you tax our endurance?
How long will that madness of yours escape us?
To what end will your unruly boldness
hurl itself at us?
This, by the way, is an example of trichotomy,
says Sister Anna Roberta, in full habit . . .

~
. . . and why the Fates red-carded Caesar
in the middle of the Rubicon
and why Hannibal joined the circus
and mastered elephantese.

~
I can well understand why children love sand, says
Wittgenstein.

~
Frank O'Hara appears.
He's living in a yurt . . . in the Dacks
doing this . . . doing that
And here I am, the
center of all beauty!

writing these poems!

Imagine!

~

And how about Gustav Mahler
channeling Frank O'Hara . . . bicycling Bavaria:
I seem to be absolutely born for the cycle!
deconstructing Moby's Porcelain
disconnecting the dots
as if it matters . . . and it does . . . but not to
his gorgeous, alcoholic, hearing-impaired,
superflirty, 19 years his junior, wife and muse, Alma,
whose bedpost is mottled
with the notches of affairs.
Billed as the most beautiful girl in Vienna
She believes several men are better than one
and spills as much to Freud
one afternoon on his couch.
Never a fan of her husband's music
She chooses none of his for her funeral
50 years after his death.

~

And here again is Frank:
It's my lunch hour, so I go
for a walk among the hum-colored
cabs. First, down the sidewalk
where laborers feed their dirty
glistening torsos sandwiches
and Coca-Cola, . . .

~

A photograph's all that's left of you, Sing Simon and Garfunkel.

~

O. Winston Link photographs the last days of steam locomotives rumbling through town . . . four warning blasts at the crossing.

~

A Chinese takeaway with a stem of Malbec.
You examine religious artifacts
and collages
and a life drawing class
in the bedroom
captivated
by the mouth and angle of shoulders
as she turns to read the script's next line.

~

An algorithm walks into a bar
quoting José Ortega y Gasset:
I am I and my circumstances.

~

In the mountains on a summer day with Li Po:
Gently I stir a white feather fan,
with open shirt sitting in a green wood.
I take off my cap and hang it on a jutting stone:
A wind from the pine trees trickles on my bare head.

~

You're walking along Commercial Street
in Provincetown
past Mary Oliver's ghost

sitting outside her oceanfront cottage
then on to the tip of the Cape
and Stanley Kunitz's tiered garden,
snakes dangling head-down, entwined
in a brazen love-knot . . .
the tide lapping the Provincetown Inn
with memories of the Moors . . .
more than a bit raffish . . .
presided over by Scooter, the pet owl . . .

~

And here's Gary Snyder's homage
to log truck drivers:
In the high seat, before-dawn dark,
Polished hubs gleam
And the shiny diesel stack
warms and flutters
Up the Tyler Road grade
To the logging on Poorman creek.
Thirty miles of dust.
There is no other life . . .

~

Listening to it, we become ocean, says John Cage.

~

Become ocean . . . all become ocean.
We hold these truths to be self-evident
prestidigitating words words words
into cauldrons of delight
the double double toil and troubles
given 24 hours to get outta Dodge

while you like Proust
for a long time going to bed early
seduce the watcher at the gate
slip past the dozing Rottweilers
in the warm fragrant kitchen
and into the hidden room
behind the stacks in the library
to gaze upon hundreds of portraits of beauty
from the comfort of a Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
white leather Barcelona chair
circa 1929
before being eyeblinked back
to Tanglewood
surrounded by shadowy strangers
plodding toward the parking lot
united in their quest
for their anxious vehicles
chomping at the bit to traverse
lonely upstate two-lanes
on their late-night return trip home.

~
It comes full circle . . . all of it . . .
the dots connected . . . disconnected . . .
fading from view . . .
with paybacks and fallbacks
playbacks and callbacks
wetbacks and drybacks
and boxes of ephemera
near the counter of the old, lamented

Avenue Victor Hugo BookShop in Boston,
Dan ChaiSSon wrote in The New Yorker
brimmed with
mangy postcards
wedding announcements
lobby cards
vinyl LPs
hippie stickers and patches
Civil Defense pamphlets and evacuation maps
poker chips
Old Maid decks
and skinny dogeared self-published PO-ET-RY
chapbooks.

The mixing of your lines
bears the aweSomeneneSS of youth.
The imperfection is imperfect, perhaps,
yet as perfectly as possible
as perfectly as you know how
with the almost-imperceptible mistakes
making it delightful.
Let diSorder triumph along the boulevards of
redaction
where the ifs ands and buts barter transfusions.
Adjusting your sightline along the monochrome,
you reSemble a look-alike
from your favorite film - The Turin HorSe -
the wake of which is a which of a which
but my advice is not to wait it out.

You will know, trust me.

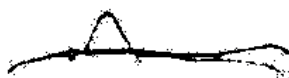
And it will be good.

~

You write what you want to write in the way that it
has to be, says Anne Carson.

~

Late at night when you lie awake,
tell yourself that you love who you are,
that your half-concealed life
is not without promise.



Swimming in happenstance press

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